

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. Department of Education (ED), Office of Student Financial Assistance Programs (SFA) became the first Performance-Based Organization (PBO) in the U.S. government through last year's reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. SFA has since embarked on a modernization effort to transform itself into a truly customer-focused and performance-oriented organization. This modernization effort will improve service to customers and partners while efficiently managing program costs and making better use of information technology (IT).

While SFA's modernization initiative encompasses the entire operations of the PBO, a key component of the initiative is the reinvention of the processes and systems that support the delivery of student financial assistance. It is in this area that Project EASI/ED (Easy Access for Students and Institutions/ED) supports SFA's overall modernization goals. Project EASI/ED is the Department's initial effort to implement the Project EASI vision within its own systems and processes. Project EASI itself is an effort by members of the postsecondary education community to define and to implement a customer-focused "system" to support postsecondary education.

A major first step in SFA's progress towards modernization is the development of an SFA Modernization Blueprint (the Blueprint). The Blueprint will define a target IT architecture for SFA and will include a detailed strategy for implementing that architecture. Version 1.0 of the Blueprint will be completed on September 30, 1999. Existing and ongoing Project EASI/ED work, including this document, is being leveraged in the development of the Blueprint to ensure the continuity of SFA's modernization plans with the Project EASI vision.

As the Blueprint moves towards implementation, it is anticipated that multiple, parallel development or acquisition efforts will be undertaken, utilizing multiple contractors. The purpose of this *Project EASI/ED System-Wide Design Standards Document* is to deliver a set of coordinated system-wide design requirements to ensure that design and development work undertaken by different contractors will be carried out in a consistent manner. The following requirements and standards are defined in this document:

- **Security Requirements** - a set of SFA-wide security requirements;
- **Performance Requirements** - a set of high-level performance requirements for SFA's modernized systems;
- **Interface Strategy and Standards** - standards to be used in the development of interfaces between SFA and its trading partners, and a strategy for the synchronization of information within SFA's systems; and
- **User Interface Standards** - standards to govern the development of user interfaces to SFA's modernized systems.

In addition, this document defines a single, overarching framework for the delivery of Blueprint functionality (the Framework). The Framework provides a consistent set of processes and standards to ensure that all implementation efforts (e.g., acquisition of commercially provided functionality, reuse of current systems, or development of custom software) are well integrated with the SFA investment management, acquisition management, and IT architecture management processes.

The major elements that comprise the Framework are as follows:

- Architecture Management;
- Change Management;
- Investment Management;
- Acquisition Management;
- Configuration Management;
- Systems Development Life Cycle Methodology; and
- Technology Tools and Standards.

Figure 1 below presents these elements and the high-level relationships among them. The ultimate goal of the Framework is to provide SFA with a roadmap that documents the major actions needed to implement any of the IT implementation projects defined by the Blueprint.

A substantial amount of work has been done over the last several years on defining a modernization vision for SFA. This work, including the work completed by Project EASI/ED, is being leveraged to develop the SFA Modernization Blueprint. Once the initial version of the Blueprint is complete and implementation work begins, many of the products and deliverables defined in the Framework will already exist in whole or in part. The work that SFA has already completed can be leveraged to ensure that SFA implements modernized systems that are both aligned with the mission of the new PBO, and are consistent with the Project EASI vision.